

Spotlight on Gromo Alex, MDRP Senior Demobilization and Reintegration Specialist

N&N 2006, no. 8



Gromo Alex lives and works in Rwanda, but hasn't been home for more than 20 days total in the last few months. He has been traveling continuously. A Senior Demobilization and Reintegration Specialist for the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) in Rwanda, he has recently also started working on MDRP projects in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Republic of Congo (RoC).

Alex sees his role as that of giving support and encouragement to governments in their demobilization and reintegration (D&R) efforts. "It's all subtle," he says of his job. "There's so much expertise around me – both in the government programs and in MDRP – that a lot of what I do is track what's going on, and then be sure I'm present to provide technical assistance if needed."

Recently, for example, Alex traveled to the Central African Republic to visit MDRP's special project for D&R, implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). There, he confirmed what other colleagues had reported earlier – that reintegration was moving at a dangerously slow pace. He will lead a mid-term review later this month to make final conclusions and recommendations, and he and other MDRP members hope to revamp the special project and ensure more efficient project implementation in order to address ex-combatant discontent and general project shortcomings.

Alex has also been working with others to push forward the issue of Combatants on Foreign Soil, or COFS. "Because of our work, there's a new acronym at the Bank," he says. "COFS are an important part of D&R work, which needs more attention. Some ex-combatants can't go back to their own countries and are preventing others who otherwise could from doing so."

"For me," he says, "The best part of my job is seeing the expression on the faces of ex-combatants who have just completed some sort of training. To see



News & Noteworthy

someone looks at the certificate they've just received with that look of pride, it makes it all worthwhile. That's the whole thing right there for me."

And the hardest part? "Knowing there are COFS who cannot go home to Rwanda because their commanders will not let them return." Those who escape are at risk of being caught and killed. Many child ex-combatants in particular have described having to choose the right moment to run away, knowing that if they are caught in the act, they'll be killed in front of the others to discourage them from trying to escape themselves.

"The mere fact that there are children serving in these groups seems at times to escape the damnation of the international community," says a frustrated Alex. "Using children as soldiers is an international crime, and yet how much effort goes into decrying this practice? What does the international community demand of the FDLR [Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda] concerning its use of child soldiers when the armed group protests the use of *gacaca* courts? * None. It's so easy for the international community to forget what happened in 1994, but the ideology still exists. *Genocidaires* and people who believe in that kind of ideology live in practically every country of the world. You hear people saying we need to give these people their political space too. Well, they already had their political space once and look what they did with it."



Alex was in Rwanda working for the United Nations Development Program during the genocide, and that experience has had an impact on his perspective and work. He is constantly aware, he says, of the risks of bringing people back for reintegration. "You are not sure if bringing them back is the right thing to do, but we support the decision to do so," he says. "Some survivors want to move on. They may never forget or forgive, but they also don't want to dwell on what happened and what they cannot change or erase from their memories."



Asked what MDRP can do, Alex says he believes that MDRP cannot deal with issues of justice. What the program can do, however, is facilitate reintegration efforts of the government, giving ex-combatants the best chance of succeeding in their civilian lives.

So far in Rwanda, for example, 6,000 people have been reintegrated without one incidence of violence or abuse. "That's pretty incredible," he points out.

* *Gacaca* is the name for traditional Rwandan courts currently being used for administering community-determined justice to those accused of participation in the genocide and in other atrocities perpetrated during that time.

The header features a dark orange background with silhouettes of people and birds. The text "News & Noteworthy" is prominently displayed in white, bold font across the center.

News & Noteworthy

Alex describes Rwanda's national D&R program as "one of the best." This is, he explains, because the Commission is responsive to lessons learned. "They've reviewed their experience with beneficiaries, the disabled, and on gender, for example, and then they've adapted accordingly."

Alex says that MDRP itself is also growing and changing. For one thing, it has increased in size – a positive development in his view, given the scope of the work, but still one that is requiring adjustment. "It's better than it was, and we're learning, but we can do better."

He also thinks that the program could open up further. "We're focused too much on our own program and projects," he states. "And I think we miss good people and good opportunities that way. We've improved, but we need to keep working on it. We also need to reach out to other programs working on similar issues, like the Sierra Leone program did, for example. In that case, members of all of the national programs visited their program and came away with many useful lessons learned"

What he appreciates most about MDRP is the spirit of collaboration: "There's almost nothing about MDRP work that is individual-oriented. It's all teamwork and participation."

For more information on MDRP, please visit www.mdrp.org or contact Bruno Donat, Communications Officer, MDRP Secretariat, World Bank at info@mdrp.org.